MYRTLE KING KAAPU

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Myrtle King Kaapu

(1898 -)

Mrs. Kaapu was born in Oregon and first came to Hawaii in 1922. She taught in Waianae for a year before going on a world tour with a friend, both of them teaching in various countries en route.

In 1928 she returned to Hawaii where she met and married the late David M. Kaapu, who had built a grass house on the family's property in Punalu'u, had begun wearing a malo, and was living in the old Hawaiian style in order to preserve the culture of his people. This style of living appealed to Myrtle King because she had always wanted to be a farmer and had done a great deal of camping on hitchhiking tours of the United States in the early twenties. During her world tour she had lived on a houseboat in Kashmir.

In this interview, Mrs. Kaapu describes her journeys, teaching experiences and methods, and her husband's way of life.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

Myrtle King Kaapu

(Mrs. David M. Kaapu)

At her home, 53-310 Kamehameha Highway, Hauula 96717

Sometime in 1971-72

K: Myrtle King Kaapu

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: Well, where you were born and something about your parents.

K: All right. I was born in Baker, Oregon in 1898 (chuckles). September 19, 1898. I lived there only two years and we moved around. My father was a lawyer. He had a law office in Baker, another one down in Ontario, Oregon so we moved down there for awhile. And then, when I was ready for school, he opened another law office over at the border of Washington at Walla Walla, thinking to take my brother and me to a little larger town with perhaps better schools, so I started to school in Walla Walla.

When I was ready for the fourth grade, I think it was, he was appointed to the Supreme [Court] bench in Oregon, so we moved to the capital, Salem, and we lived there for four years. Then we moved to Portland and lived there for two years but at that time he was Woodrow Wilson's campaign manager for the Pacific Coast and mountain states. After Woodrow Wilson's election, he had an appointment to go to Washington, D. C. to be head of the legal department in the reclamation service, so when I was a sophmore in high school we moved to Washington. It was 1913 and we lived there until 1921. I went through Goucher College in Baltimore.

I have, as you see, lived in towns, cities and so on and should have been quite a civilized person by then, but my longing all my life. . . . Even when I was three years old, they told me, I was asked when visiting my mother's folks in Indiana, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" and I always said, "Oh, I'm going to marry a farmer," because I didn't like city life--town life--I wanted to be in the country.

My father had, all my life, promised me a pony which never materialized because we had never lived quite where it was convenient to have one. So when I was graduating

from high school in Washington I said, "Well, why don't you buy me a canoe now instead of that pony?" and he said all right, he would. So I had a canoe and I found another girl who knew how to paddle a canoe and we went out on the Potomac [River] and spent our Saturdays and Sundays and so on and built a fire and cooked over the fire and stayed out by our campfire until midnight and all that kind of thing and had a grand time with the canoe.

Meanwhile, I was in college in Baltimore and one of my teachers there was interested in outdoors and I took her out on the river with me a bit. This other friend and I bought horses one summer--saddle horses--and rode and camped as we went, over into Virginia and back up into Pennsylvania, down again into Maryland, through Maryland back home. On that trip I think she was the one who had the inspiration. We saw, even for those days, a lot of cars on the road with just one person in a car and we thought it might be fun to start out and see how far we could go and what we could do hitchhiking. So we are the country's very first hitchhikers. I'm quite sure of that. (laughter) In 1920, I think--that was the year I graduated from college--we hitchhiked from Washington, D. C. to Miami and back.

And then this teacher of mine who'd gone out on the river with me a few times and I decided to hitchhike from Washington out to Oregon the following summer and she wanted to go on around the world. I still wanted to be a farmer, not a farmer's wife by this time. It was not the farmer's wife's job that I really wanted. I still had been wishing I could be a farmer but I didn't have a farm and no money to get one and I had no excuse not to go around the world, though I really didn't want to. So I said all right and we hitchhiked out to Oregon and then an interesting thing happened to me.

We had run out of money almost entirely and it was time to get busy and work a bit. I hadn't been trained to do anything particular so it was a question of what to do. I didn't really want to be a teacher but they were just beginning--this was 1921--to require fifteen credits in education if you were going to teach in order to have a certificate. So I went to see the superintendent of schools in Oregon and asked him if I could get any sort of position to teach. He said, "Well, don't you have credits in psychology and philosophy?" and I said, "Oh yes, I had twelve." "Well," he said, "we can count those. It's the same thing. Only if you want a permanent certificate you'd have to make up the other credits." So I got a temporary certificate.

I applied at an agency and after a few days the agency man notified me that they wanted a teacher in a small town south of Portland. They had had four high school teachers

and they needed a fifth and they wanted me to teach Latin and French and ancient history. I said, "Well, my goodness, I couldn't do that. French is the only subject I ever flunked in my life." And he said, "Anyhow, go and get the job. So what?" (laughter) He was a very high-pressure-type salesman and wouldn't let me say no.

So I found myself getting on the bus and going down there. I kept very still about what I thought of myself. I'm usually outspoken and frank but I just didn't say what I thought of myself as a teacher and the principal liked me very much and had what at that time was a western point of view that it was something special to have someone who'd been trained in an eastern college. (laughter) She didn't know I was still just a wild and woolly westerner. So I got the job.

And this is the reason I tell you about this. This is when I learned something more valuable than I've ever found taught in any course in education that I've taken since at the university. I have a master's in education now at the university here but they never did teach me this. I was a good French teacher because I knew what was hard about French. So I go about preaching to all would-be teachers that they should teach a subject they flunked in or at least one that was not easy for them; whereas, they commonly pick on something that they were extremely talented and brilliant in and learned with ease. When they teach that I'm sure they're quite frustrated, thinking, "These poor stupid kids. What's the matter with them?" If they would teach something they had flunked in they would be good teachers as I was. (laughter)

M: That's kind of novel.

K: Yes. My friend, who had a Ph. D. from Yale, had a hard time getting a teaching job because she didn't have the fifteen credits in education, but finally, in the State of Washington, they decided that maybe she could teach without that (laughter) and she taught in a high school way up in the north of Washington while I taught there in Oregon. The following summer we hitchhiked down to the end of California . . . then came to Hawaii. This is the summer of 1922.

Well, it would be interesting perhaps to know that the person who met us at the boat when we arrived in Hawaii was Mrs. [Gobindram J.] Watumull.

M: Oh, for heaven sakes.

K: Yes, because she was. . . . I've forgotten how I got in touch with her here in Hawaii before I came, but she and I had had the same music teacher in Portland, Oregon--piano

teacher--and we didn't know each other well, just had perhaps met at a recital or something like that. But I can't recall, you know, why. But anyway, it was she who did meet us. Oh yes, I know the connection now. They started Hanahau'oli School [in 1918] and my friend's college classmate was the principal there. That was the connection, of course. So my friend's classmate didn't have a car, I believe, and Mrs. Watumull and this friend met us at the boat and took us back to her apartment and we stayed there briefly while we found jobs. So all these years, I haven't seen Mrs. Watumull very often but we are old, old-time friends.

Then I got a job to teach out at Waianae, fifth grade, something I knew nothing about but anyway, again it didn't matter because I used my common sense. (chuckles) My friend taught in Honolulu for the year. Of course we had a lovely time here. We visited the volcano when it was erupting at Christmastime. We went to Maui and went through Haleakala on horseback and went to Kauai and all before we left.

And then we went to Japan, summer of 1923, and left all of our things in Yokohama at the YWCA hostel, went off again with our camping equipment and all that and sightseeing and went in the mountains and had a beautiful time in Japan.

M: That was rather unusual for two white people to be camping.

K: Yes, it was. It was. The Japanese, too, at that time had not done much camping and they loved it. They were always thrilled to death over our little, tiny waterproof silk tent and they were always so very kind to us in helping us to find a place to put it up and concerned that we were getting wet or what.

The third day we were in Japan, we went off to climb Mount Fuji, not with the camping equipment. That was a great experience in itself. I suppose they still do it the same way. You climb Mount Fuji preferably during full moon time all night long and be on the top for the sunrise. That's how you do it and it was just beautiful.

Well, we were off in the Japan Alps without camping equipment that time and came back to Yokohama on the 29th of August and changed our equipment a little bit to go to the northern island where we expected it to be a bit more rainy with the fall coming up. On the first day of September 1923, Yokohama and Tokyo were almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake and fire, including of course our trunks and all our things in Yokohama. (chuckles) And this also was one of life's very enlightening experiences, to be left without things of any kind. We didn't hurry, we stayed our two weeks up in the northern island because

there was no point in coming back. And then when we did we stopped off at Sendai, a city at the far north of the main island. We had met some people from there at a little resort in the south where we had stayed for awhile and they had said, if we ever came through there, to look them up and that sort of thing. So we went to this one school first. It was an Episcopal school, I remember, and the lady who met us at the door threw up her hands and said, "Oh my, we all thought you were dead," because they thought we had just gone back to Yokahama and got into the earthquake.

So we stayed there and we went over to the college and high school of the Reform Church to see if there's any possibility of getting a job and they said, "Yes, it just happened that one woman teacher in the men's college had gone home sick" and they always liked to have one woman teacher of English so the young men could hear English spoken in a woman's voice as well as a man's and they'd like to have my older friend [Miss Tucker] for that position. And they also had a place for me in the girls' high school and college--had a couple of college classes too. And so we stayed the year in Sendai.

First we had to take about ten days to sew some dresses by hand and get ourselves adjusted and find a place to live and we lived in a Japanese house, upstairs, with a Japanese couple. He was a teacher in the high school and he and his wife lived downstairs. And that was one of the great joys of our year because we enjoyed them and we enjoyed our surroundings in our Japanese house. We had no foreign-type furniture of any kind except for a little heating stove. They don't use such things but for us it was cold there, snowy weather. We took up a couple of the mats, the tatami, and made up a little cooking place in one room and had a little charcoal stove. And we bought Japanese quilts, with one under us and one over us, and things like that.

To keep warm, I had a coat made by a tailor, because tailors made foreign-style suits for Japanese men for business purposes, so they could make me a coat. And my friend made a cape out of some old cloth. And for shoes, I managed to find one pair of some kind of shoes that would fit big feet. (laughter) And my friend, I think, got some that were sent up there in some refugee clothing for people who had been in the earthquake and so on. Anyway, we managed to get an outfit and get through the year.

Well, we had promised to stay till the end of the official school year, which was the end of March, and then that let us be out in the beautiful cherry blossom time for some more sightseeing before we moved on, so we went around down south and around to do that and had another lovely time before we left Japan.

We left in June or something like that for China. We

got over there and went down south from Shanghai to where most of the foreigners lived for summer on a mountain top to be a bit cooler and stayed there most of the summer. Our missionary friends from Japan were over there and we boarded where they did.

I had written a few letters around different parts of China about jobs and I guess we were given these jobs before we went up there, by letter. Anyway, we took the boat up north to the port of Tsingtao, went inland to Tsinan--Tsinanfu, capital of that [Shantung] province--and we taught in Shantung Christian University, both of us. I taught in the medical school and my friend taught in arts and sciences, teaching English. Oh, I forgot to say, in Japan and again in China, what you teach in those countries is the conversational English and usually native teachers teach literature and grammar. So that was what we were doing. I was at least an English major in college and I'd gone in for phonetics and the linguistic type of thing, composition and so on, so I could make use of some of the things there in the teaching.

So we stayed the year in China and at the end of the year--I think this was 1924--as school was ending in June, there was a pretty country-wide, I think--the whole of China was on strike. The laborers were on strike about something--it was against the British more or less--but students also went on strike in sympathy and I think this is rather interesting now. We must realize that Chinese students were striking in 1924.

M: Right.

K: So at the time we left China, things were quite upset. The war lords were fighting each other a bit and to go up to Peking, as we did for a visit--we went at Christmastime and again in June--a person must go down to the railway station with his baggage and so on and wait until he could jump on a train and crowd in and get a place. It was up to him. We didn't know when the train would come but at least we made those two trips to Peking and saw some of the beautiful things of China. We saw the Great Wall.

Well, we left in June, intending to go to Manilla for a year. We got on a boat in Shanghai and went to Hong Kong. Our boat was a French boat. It was anchored out in the harbor. We went ashore and we had let our visas expire for foreign countries, intending to go back to American territory--Manilla--and we engaged passage to go over within a few days, but after a few hours we went back again and they said, no, that it was all cancelled; that the boats of the American President Line were afraid to come into port for fear the Chinese crew would desert on account of this strike so they were going to by-pass. We

didn't know when we'd get out of there, so we thought, well, this is no place for us. We can't stay here paying hotel bills and so on, we'd better see if we can get back on that French boat. This is background for my Hawaiian--later Hawaiian things, that is.

We got some kind of permission from the French Consulate there to go to Saigon and we went back on our boat and went on to Singapore. From there we took a trip by car way, way up to the Ruins of Angkor and then came back and proceeded to India.

In India my friend had friends teaching at Isabella Thoburn College. In fact, I think that college was sort of a sister college to her alma mater in New England. Anyhow, we stayed there a little while and they needed her again. Somebody had to go home and they needed her and I wrote letters all around to mission schools and got a place up near Delhi in the mission school for girls and we taught the whole year. Then summer came and we went up into Kashmir and rented a houseboat and were going to live in it for awhile and we did stay quite awhile because I had smallpox there and it took all summer to have it and get cleared up again.

This is the only time now we had in advance, in Baghdad, a job. It was for the same mission we taught for in Japan--American School for Boys in Baghdad--and my friend taught in high school.

M: In Baghdad?

K: Baghdad, Iraq.

M: Oh my gosh. (chuckles)

K: And I taught--did I have any high school classes? I remember the primary classes because that was far more memorable, the little kids, their not knowing any English and my not knowing any Arabic. (Lynda chuckles) But that was all right. It's the way for them to learn English. Even in India at the end of the year some of the girls said to me--the older girls--"Oh, Miss Sahib, it's the first time I've ever heard the little children speak English." I had two classes of little ones and the reason they did is because I pretended to be so stupid that I didn't know when they talked to me in Hindustani and so they learned English well.

So we stayed the year. We went out, as people did in those days, by car. No planes yet at this period. This was 1926 now. No, this must be '27. It was the only way you could go across the desert quite some distance to Syria, took a boat up to Constantinople and did a little sightseeing there and came back down to Italy and then we put

on our hiking clothes again and shipped our baggage over to Switzerland and went up as near as we could get to the Swiss border and hiked over the mountains and down into Switzerland and we actually never did any camping there because we found that, for one thing, any level spot of land was already being used for something else and then it was so delightful to stay in the little Swiss chalets. We went up to the Matterhorn on the cable train and then went on out by boat down the Rhine through Germany and stopped in Germany and had a little brief visit with the sister of the plantation manager at Waianae.

She had been living here in Hawaii when I was here. She had married in Germany and was living in Germany. Anyhow she was back in Germany and I had a little visit with her and then we came on out to Belgium, took the boat over to England, spent three or four weeks in England. It might be interesting but probably this is going too far into detail that people in England did not take us for Americans. I suppose by this time we didn't feel like Americans--we didn't have vibrations of American tourists--but also, they just thought that our difference in language was due to our coming from some other area in England that they were unfamiliar with. They didn't recognize us as Americans and that was rather fun.

And then back to New York and that was as great a shock, I guess, as any foreign country because we'd been gone so long and one of the most astonishing things was to see the rubbish all around everywhere, in the parks and so on, because where we had been people didn't waste things like that. They needed all that for fuel or whatever and there for years and years we hadn't seen that type of thing. (chuckles)

I went to visit my brother in Washington, D. C. for a little while, then we hitchhiked--I forget what Miss Tucker did that time--from Washington out to Chicago. It was getting toward Thanksgiving time. Oh yes, she went to see her relatives, I guess, then and I went out to the Pacific Coast to Oregon where my folks had moved back to Oregon meanwhile. I stayed there the rest of that year and then the following year I wrote over to Hawaii. Oh, meanwhile, I decided that I really would be a teacher.

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(Lynda notes that side 2 of the tape "got snarled apparently" so it is blank)

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

Our family name is actually Ka-'apu-'awa-o-Kamehameha.

He says his father didn't tell him this until he was grown-up. I think probably in the real old days of royalty and so on, it wasn't too safe to be known, but anyway, the name shows that he must have been a very close family member of Kamehameha because it says that his great-grandfather or whoever it was, was the awa-cupbearer to Kamehameha, which means he chewed up the awa root, put it in a cup, mixed it with water, and offered it to the king and not just anybody could do that kind of intimate job for the king. (chuckles) So it means he was closely related to Kamehameha.

Now the thing is, at Hana, Maui, that is the ancestral home way back. The Kamehamehas were over on the Island of Hawaii, as we know them, but before that, very far back, they came from the Hana area and David had never been to Hana until he went with me to the school board meeting that day. He was thrilled about going there and someone heard him say--I didn't hear this--that evening in the hotel, talking to some local people, "You know, it's so beautiful and peaceful here, I could go to sleep and sleep forever." And that's what he did that night.

M: For heaven sake.

K: Isn't that something? And I think, beyond that also comes to me the message, that his Kamehameha ancestors' spirits just came and invited him over to join them. That's what I think. So I have never for one moment felt the least bit sad about it. I've just thought it was wonderful to go like that.

M: Was your husband born in Punalu'u?

K: Yes.

M: Would the property come down in his family then?

K: Yes, um hm.

M: How much land was there?

K: I don't know originally. There's a lot of different pieces all around and some of them that still have undivided interest in, but our spot where we lived is just a little under three acres. But there were quite a number of other pieces up in the mountains and around and not too long ago there was a lawsuit by one of the families to quit the title and they claimed the title because they had actually been renting the land to Kahuku Plantation and we had never done anything with it. I'd paid some taxes on it once in awhile when they billed me but that was all and so we

lost our case and they got claim to it. But there're still a few more pieces that are undivided from way back, several generations, and they belong partly to us but I doubt that we could ever claim them.

M: Um hm. Well, did your husband just . . .

K: Oh, now, how he came to start this Hawaiian stuff.

M: Yeh.

K: Yeh, that's important. When he was a child, maybe nine years old or so, there was just one grass house people still lived in on Oahu and it was out on our side of the island near Hauula--in Hauula, you might say--and he used to see, even in those days, tourists going around the island and he saw this happen: they wanted to stop there and see those Hawaiians, see how they lived and so on, and the Hawaiians ran and hid. They were ashamed if anyone should see how they ate or anything and he, right then, had the idea that that's not right; they should be proud of their culture and not feel that way. And I'm sure that was planted really in his mind right then and he never forgot that.

And so, when he grew up and was in his late twenties, I think, he then decided to try to build a grass house. He'd always wanted to all his life, I guess. Hawaiian is his native language. He used to get punished at school for speaking Hawaiian. (chuckles) Anyway, he can read Hawaiian and so he read some of the old accounts that you can find in Bishop Museum about grass-house building. That is, he got the real stuff there and then experimented with it.

Now the first house he built, not the one you see there, he didn't use logs, he used two-by-fours or some kind of wood--lumber--inside but he tied the grass on and all that. But later he tore all that down and there's a very nice grass house there now, made with ohi'a-lehua logs that he got from Hawaii and that is entirely tied.

M: Those things really hold up, too, don't they?

K: Oh yes, uh huh. And then he asked his father to let him have title to this part of the land there, you see, and it was just a swamp and people thought he was absolutely crazy because what could he ever do with that land. And so what he did was to dig a pond to get dirt to fill it up, you see. He'd have a pond and at the same time use the bottom of the pond to make dirt. To me that's one of the most interesting things about the place--you should come and see it sometime--is that everything you see there he

put there, even the ground. He began wearing a malo, loincloth, and people really thought he was nuts. Really. And at first were so ashamed of him, that he'd do these crazy things. Grass houses had gone out of style and weren't considered decent and proper and certainly not loincloths. (chuckles) Looks as if he had nothing on there because the dog's sitting on his malo (in a photo). So that's how it all started.

M: How did he earn his living while he was doing all this?

K: Oh. Oh yes, that's a good question. He'd planted coconut trees and little fern stuff across the street, along the ocean there, and built a little grass pavilion there-- grass-thatched pavilion--before the government then decided that it would be a public park, after he'd fixed it up, and made him a part-time park keeper for which he was getting thirty dollars a month when I married him. (laughter)

M: That was your income.

K: That was his income when I married him. Later on, then, he was full-time park keeper. I've forgotten what he got but there was more money, of course, as time went on. (telephone rings) So he was park keeper there at Punalu'u Park all the years until he retired in 1962. We both retired in '62.

Oh, of course then, I was teaching after I married him at Kahuku High School for five years, then the last eighteen years at Farrington High School in Honolulu. I changed and I commuted from out there after our son had started to school, had gone through two grades. I decided it wasn't fair to children for them to have to go to school in the same school where their mother was teaching. Even if I was teaching seniors and they were in the first grade, they weren't totally free to be themselves. So we made the switch over to come to town and I taught at Farrington for eighteen years.

M: Hmm. Well, you've certainly just had an unusual . . .

K: Yeh, you ought to come by sometime and I'll show you around the place a little bit.

M: I'd love to.

K: Um hm. He always liked to play hard-to-get and he wouldn't . . . . What he was hoping all his life, I expressed this rather neatly in a. . . . Mrs. Taba, one of our school board members, is a writer and she wrote a little article

about him and his passing away and so on and then I edited it a little bit and let the family read it and in that I expressed it rather neatly. I should find that and give it to you. It was his lifelong desire to have his work recognized for its educational value and he always hoped --but, of course, the prophet is not without honor save in his own country--that government or the [Hawaii] Visitors Bureau or someone would give him support so that he could welcome people freely to come in, like a museum. But they never would do that and so he didn't like to charge people admission. That changes the spirit of it, you see. But he did at one time have tourists coming rather regularly and then he stopped that and didn't let anyone in. And then there was one driver he allowed to come and bring his guests. And then his nephew at one time started a little tour business but that sort of petered out and so, really, these last years there were very few people, I think, that even knew there was such a place.

M: I'd known about it through other people that knew you.

K: Um hm. But if anybody did want to come, they came by special appointment and he did charge admission. But now, of course, I let anybody come in that wants to look around so if you call me up first, I know when you're coming or if you happen to go by, you can try stopping by the gate and tooting the horn in some kind of fancy way and repeating it and then I know somebody's calling me, I'd let you in.

M: Well, how did you adjust to this?

K: Oh, well now look! You ought not even to ask such a question, having heard all of my life story. (Lynda chuckles) Adjust? No, I was . . .

M: Well, it's one thing, though, to do it on a year by year basis and then knowing you can come back . . .

K: Oh no, but I did it four months crossing the country. I slept on the ground in a little tent and cooked on a fire. This is far more comfortable, you might say, than that and all these things I did for many years. And really, all my vacations and weekends I had kids out camping and doing the same thing, only more so than this, so that I used to tell him that I didn't marry him in spite of the grass houses and that life, I married him for that. (laughter) So, no no, I always told him I'd gone native far more than he ever had. But no, it was no matter of adjustment; it was a perfectly natural life to me.

M: Uh huh.

K: I had any amount of it. Almost all the cooking I'd ever done in my life, I'd done on a fire [outdoors]. I'd never done too much of that in a house the way most people do. (laughter)

M: Well, he must have felt as though he was getting the right sort of person, huh?

K: Yeh, I think with both of us there wasn't much discussion. We just both knew. The only thing, really, we happened to discuss before we married was: his mother or father--which was it?--had died not too long before and he told me about bringing home the ashes on his little Model-T truck and putting them on that island in the pond and how the community was so shocked and said, "My goodness, doesn't he love his father? He didn't have a funeral." He said that's how he wanted his done too and I said, "Yeh, that's how I would." So that was the one thing we really did. And that's what we did, you see, just his sisters and family members and so on.

Over on Maui I simply left the body there to be cremated and they shipped home the ashes to me. And then his minister son now lives on Hawaii at Hilo and he was over for the graduation of his daughter from Kamehameha School so the 6th of June or something like that, I'd just got the ashes back, and so he was here and his family and children and his other sisters and their families and all, so we just gathered. My son-in-law got the place kind of fixed up--fixed up the bridge, just a plank from the shore to the island and he put a little railing so if people wanted to walk out they wouldn't fall in the water, and dug a hole out there and got it ready. And then we met and my daughter put his malos--all of his old ones, the used ones--down in the hole first and I put his pipes in and the little carved necklace thing that he always wore that he claimed to have carved but he didn't--I brought it from China (laughter). I put those in and his minister son put the ashes in and Kekoa put this famous hat of his in with all those things in there.

M: Oh how lovely.

K: With the ashes, yes. And his minister son said a little prayer and that was it.

M: Is that you in this picture?

K: Oh yes. This was taken twelve years ago. I know by the dog. I know which dog that was. That dog's the same age as my grandson who is twelve years old.

M: Gee, that sounds like just the perfect way to bury somebody.

K: Oh yes, it was all just lovely. I've never had a minute's sadness. And when I was going to come back from Maui, I thought, well. . . . For many years, of course--I don't know, always maybe--I've always thought when I heard about anybody's passing away in his sleep like that, why, how wonderful, that's the way to go, you know. But then I always thought, well, but you don't know. That's how you think, but you don't know how you're going to feel if it's somebody close to you, so I was especially delighted to find that my thoughts and my feelings matched, you know. And also, then, I thought, well, one more thing now, how are you going to feel when you get home? I got home. I didn't feel a thing; just the same as ever. Just as if he's still there. His body's not there but he's there just the same as ever, as far as I'm concerned. I've never felt lonesome, sad, or any of that kind of thing.

M: It's marvelous.

K: Yeh, wonderful.

M: Can you tell me any more interesting stories about your experiences as a teacher, especially back in the early days, what it was like?

K: Ohh.

M: Or any special problems, you know, that teachers wouldn't have to cope with these days. For instance, you were saying the children would get up to recite but you didn't really know what they said so you'd just say, "Okay."

K: Well, that was because I wasn't used to the Hawaiian dialect and their intonations and rhythm and so on in some of their vocabulary that year. But then, of course, what I've been doing ever since I came back in 1928, since I had this experience teaching English to non-English-speaking people around the world, I was making use of what I'd found out. And so, all the way through I've been interested in the matter of dialect and my point of view. . . . Well, I'll tell you the origin of this.

I was president of the Pacific Speech Association--when was it, 1950? Anyway, at that time--oh, before that. Well, no, I've got to go back farther than that. I was chairman of the Territorial English Committee [1935-37], the whole territory. It was not a paid job. I wrote to all teachers, asking if they had any materials that they'd prepared for use in Hawaii and nobody had. So I put mine

into a Grammar for Hawaii that was mimeographed and distributed by the Department of Education. Then in the fifties I was president of the Pacific Speech Association and I think we sent out the letter I wrote to all teachers, not just English teachers--all teachers, public and private--asking, "What would you like us, the association, to do for you and how can we help you?" And then along with that a check sheet: "If you think English in Hawaii isn't good, what do you have in mind specifically?" and various things for them to check. In general, public school teachers all checked "The kids speak pidgin." Private school teachers almost unanimously checked, "They won't talk. They won't speak up."

Now I put those two things together. To me they mean: kids in the private schools are scared to talk, for fear they'll make a mistake in English, and the others aren't. But, the thing is then, what I was doing all my eighteen years at Farrington was I was teaching communication actually, it was not public speaking. We called it Speech but it was fifty percent communication and fifty percent the handling of dialect in relation to communication and my theory being, if you know--really know exactly--where you stand dialectically. . . . Now, you see, there was always this sociological myth going on in Hawaii from way back that they could speak perfect English if they wanted to, which is only partly true. Not very many; certainly not a hundred percent. So the thing is now, if you know--really know; have it analyzed, have the data on it--exactly where you stand, exactly what in your speech is Hawaiian dialect and what is general American and actually know completely the difference between the two and can handle either one when you want to, where it's appropriate, there won't be any trouble about your not feeling like speaking up and you'll have the power to do what you want to do.

So that was my goal. Communication most important so the first goal was to turn on communication. I did that by having them, when they came in the first day of school, told them to sit down but don't move the chairs. We had armchairs and I arranged them in what I call a square circle. One faces this way, this one this way, this one this way and this one this way and that makes a little group. And I'll explain what I did with the groups but just sitting down that way makes you feel more like communicating than sitting down in straight rows all facing one way.

You see, still, to the very end of my teaching, because I was not a teacher but a farmer, (laughter) I was always looking for ways to manipulate the structure to bring about the result I wanted. As far as my personal function, I consider a teacher's function properly to be a catalyst and I was constantly, just as with my kids, teaching them the tune on the piano and letting them lead

the class. I was constantly doing that kind of thing. I always sat at the back of the room, for instance. I used a tape recorder all the time. Anything to be done, I put on a tape recorder. They heard the tape recorder tell them to do it, not me.

When they were going to talk, I met them at the door with a box of slips turned upside down. They pulled a number. If you're first, it's not my fault. I'm not calling out names because there must be a psychological something that grows up in the child by the time he's in high school to hear his name called. You know your number and if you know it's your turn, you speak, and that gives you the impression that you chose to speak, then; at least your initiative made you do it, not my telling you you had to, you see what I mean? But if you lose track of the numbers, I'll say, "Oh, Number So-and-So's next." I mean, "We're at Number So-and-So, so you know who you are."

But I did all kinds of things like that to keep out of the way. And so, here, all right, they sit down in their group of four and then I make them choose partners for the year. Usually boys chose boys; girls chose girls and so on, so I could sort them out and where we had four girls together, four boys together, I'd have one pair of partners stand up and there were vacancies and if they wanted to choose their own seats, they could; otherwise, I'd say, "Well, you sit there and you sit there" and so on. So we'd get them sorted out as far as possible, two boys and two girls.

You want to know my problems. Well, this is the kind of thing. Now here, this is my philosophy: I believe--I really mean it--that the interesting thing is to take what is, whatever it may be, and see what you can do with it, not wish that it was some other way that the department was doing this or that or that the building was this way or that way or that there were fewer kids in the class or any of that kind of stuff. I never ever had such considerations. It was more interesting, really much more fun, to take whatever was there and figure out what to do with it. Really! I mean it. So if you ask me, I'm just blank. I don't think I ever had any problems. (laughter) If I did, why, it was fun to solve them, that's all.

So I don't know how much of this you want to hear, but anyway, one aim was turn on the communication at least with somebody at first, but not only that. I wanted to get it flowing two ways and not too much from the teacher, so on the board the first day of school I'd have assignment for tomorrow--this was when I taught at Farrington: Tomorrow you will make a campaign speech for your group for class officers. They nearly dropped dead. I said, "What did you think you're going to do in a speech class?" (laughter) Then I explained to them, "You're all officers

in this class. If you sit here, you're the chairman; if you're here, the secretary; if you're here, the librarian; if you're here, you're the treasurer. Now, instructions." I think I had something about this in instructions. "You're going to make a speech for your group, not for yourself, and it can be 'Please vote for us for your first class officers' or 'Please don't vote for us for your first class officers.'" (laughter) And they began to think, well, this is different.

But on the board, then, at the bottom, I had a note: There are two errors in number. And I explained in parentheses, getting an "s" on where it doesn't belong or leaving it off where it belongs. "In the assignment, the first person who walks up to that box on the table in the front and picks up a slip and writes down the errors with the corrections and gives that to me will get an 'A'." Well, it's very interesting. You can see that some see them but they don't like to walk up there and then somebody will do it. But what I'm trying to do, and turn it on the first day of school, is to correct me. (laughter) And so, we do this off and on all through the year. In the instructions on the board or anything on the board, you can always get an "A" if you find an error and correct it. And of course, sometimes it may be just, you know, I didn't mean to make an error too--that kind--but it doesn't matter.

I didn't go on to tell you that I helped to write a book called We Speak later, after this Grammar for Hawaii in the fifties. I wrote this one with a couple of university teachers and the mother of one of them. It's called We Speak, a manual for the bi-lingual student, and this takes up the matter of giving them the power over the use of dialect. I composed about thirty listening lessons on tape for my classes. They'd listen to the tape and respond on an outline to what they heard and they'd check from the tape answers, whether they heard what was supposed to be there, on sounds that are confused in Hawaii, for them to learn to distinguish between such things as poppy and puppy. See, you can't always tell what they mean.

I always tell the story; this is a true story. One time my husband called to me across the pond and he said, "Bring paper." I was on my way to the store and I came back and gave him a newspaper. We weren't subscribing at the time. He said, "Where my chili paper (phonetic)?" (laughter) So those sounds are confused. I have listening lessons for that.

When we were working on it, if we'd finished a particular one and they were supposed to be able to hear it, then I would make errors in that kind too. So this is how that goes: "If I say, 'Put doze books over dere on dah table,' you can get an 'A' if you'll stand up and point at me

and say, 'You said put doze books on dah table. You should say put those books on the table.'"

So I was always working, from the first day, to get the communication flowing both directions, making them correct me and this gives them also the power to receive corrections, see. If you can make communication go both ways, so much better. And so, all kinds of crazy things I did.

Oh, I was going to tell you about this speech. Now, they come back the next day and, of course, they say they didn't really understand (laughter) and so I have to give them an illustration. I had this on the board: You don't have to tell the truth. I think that's one of the ones I always made one of the mistakes in. I said, "You don't have to tell the truths." Just silly things so they could see these "s's" on or off.

For example, I'll say, "Well, you have to introduce your group members. 'This is So-and-So, our group treasurer. Don't vote for us because he spent five years in Sing Sing. And here's our librarian, So-and-So, but don't vote for us because she can't read.' (laughter) I mean, you can say anything you want to. One person in the group can get up and say, 'Vote for us' and tell why you vote for us and the other one can say, 'Don't vote for us.' You don't have to say the same thing."

But this is what I do the second day. I say, "Now, okay, we're ready then." They've drawn their slips and numbers and all this. I say, "Now, you can walk to the front of the room and make a formal speech if that's what you want to do. It's all right. But you can just stand up by your group and introduce them there if you want to. That may be better. Or, if you would rather, you can remain seated." Ahhh (sigh of relief), now this isn't as bad as we thought, see. And then really, from there on up until Christmastime, I didn't have them stand up at all to talk. We did talk sitting down, especially what I called a weekend talk, because this made the person talk about himself or something he did, which he isn't accustomed to doing, in general American. And they didn't stand up at all. But then, when I get them ready to stand up, meanwhile we've gone through a number of things about nonverbal communication and so on.

Then, this thing that they were going to stand up for first I think was reading and interpreting a poem. Anyway, that time we turn all the chairs this way and the person's supposed to go over here and I'm looking at him sideways. Oh, we did it with a newspaper headline first. That's right. Whoever walks up to do this exercise, walks up with the newspaper--I supply these--and first he must get eye-contact with somebody, anybody, anywhere, who looks as if he might listen. Then he starts off there but he can get his whole group as he goes on. He reads it and then

he asks, "Who can tell me what I read?" and he has to stay there until he can get someone to give him back what he read. If he makes a mistake and looks at me in any way, he's got to sit down and start all over again. "I'm not in this exercise. It's just you and the class." And then I'm giving him the data on whether he spoke loud enough and clear enough and started and stopped and all of this. So I train them in these things before they ever get up to do a complete job and it's not too hard. And always, no matter what they do, give back data on certain factors --beginning, ending, and details for composition--because I told them, "If you're sure how you're going to stop, you're not so likely to feel nervous."

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

Subject Index

9 Anecdote: David M. Kaapu's death

Kaapu family property

10 Mr. Kaapu's Hawaiian way of life

11 Mr. Kaapu's employment

Teaching at Kahuku High School

Farrington High School, 1944-62

12 Mr. Kaapu's cultural project

13 The Kaapu family's burial ceremony

14 Mrs. Kaapu's acceptance of death

Teaching and the Hawaiian dialect

Territorial English Committee's objectives

15 Mrs. Kaapu's Grammar for Hawaii

Pacific Speech Association's objectives

Methods of teaching Speech classes

Communication and dialect

16 Teaching methods at Farrington High School

Mrs. Kaapu's professional philosophy

17 The teaching process

We Speak, a teaching manual

Dialectical listening lessons

18 The teaching process

19 The importance of feedback in teaching

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.